Invoking Identity: Santería, AfroCubanism, and Hegemony

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*These sections are followed by a Spanish translation of the text.

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Abstract:

Santería, a syncretic religion, developed under slavery in Cuba in the early 16th century and emerged as a way to preserve AfroCuban identity. Today, Santería is a global phenomena, with *santeros* of all ages and races hailing from around the world. This thesis argues that as Cuban hegemony changed, Santería practice had to adapt its presentation and its preservation of AfroCuban identity. I identify five historic moments to show the different ways in which Santería evolved under five different hegemonies. The historic moments I discuss are: (1) Europe and West Africa at the inception of Spanish colonization and the transatlantic slave trade in the 16th century; (2) Colonial Cuba and Europe during the slave era from the 16th century through the end of the 19th century; (3) Cuban independence from Spain from the mid to the end of the 19th century; (4) Revolutionary Cuba in the 1950s and 1960s; and (5) Cuba today. Philosophies of Enlightenment and aché, institutions of marginality and authority, and even souvenirs have shaped the development of Santería. I also describe syncretism as an ongoing discourse that permits the temporality and the adaptability Santería requires. Most importantly, I propose that unraveling the history of AfroCuban religious identity models how the United States and Cuba must unravel their political identities to bring greater amity between our peoples.

Resumen:

La santería desarrolló durante la época de la esclavitud en Cuba en el siglo 16 y la religión sincrética emergió como un método de preservar la identidad afrocubana. Hoy en día, la santería es un fenómeno global, con santeros de todas edades y todas

razas de cada parte del mundo. Esta tesis argumenta que como la hegemonía cubana cambiaba, la practica de santería tenía que adaptar su presentación y su preservación de la identidad afrocubana. Identifico cinco momentos históricos para demostrar las maneras diferentes en la cual santería evolucionó debajo de cinco hegemonías diferentes. Los momentos históricos que analizo son: (1) Europa y África occidental al inicio de la colonización español y la trata de esclavos transatlántica en el siglo 16; (2) Cuba colonial y Europa durante la época de la esclavitud del siglo 16 hasta el fin del siglo 19; (3) La independencia cubana de España entre el medio de siglo 19 hasta el fin del siglo; (4) Cuba revolucionaria en los años 50 hasta los años 60; y (5) Cuba hoy en día. Las filosofías de la Ilustración y del aché, las instituciones de la marginalidad y la autoridad, e incluso los souvenirs han formado el desarrollo de la santería. También describo el sincretismo como un discurso en marcha que permite la temporalidad y la adaptabilidad que la santería requiere. De suma importancia, propongo que resolviendo la historia de las identidades religiosas afrocubanas demuestra como los Estados Unidos y Cuba deben resolverse sus identidades políticas para traer cordialidad mayor entre nuestros pueblos.

Introduction:

Various New World belief systems combine Christianity, African slave religions, and Native American beliefs from the injustices and triumphs that accompanied the colonization of the Americas. Nearly every country in the Americas has its own syncretic religion to address its specific slave and colonial past. Candomblé thrives in Brazil, Haiti prizes Vodou, and Espiritismo flourishes in Puerto Rico. These religious epistemologies validate the daily lives, successes, and struggles of their followers. They also authenticate and affirm various ethnic identities on a grander, societal scale. Religions, particularly those of the New World, must embrace an adaptable and preservative relationship with the cultural hegemony of its time to perpetuate the ethnic identities of its followers.

Cuban Santería, from ancient West Africa through contemporary Cuba, exemplifies the relationship between cultural hegemony and religion's adaptable nature. Five historic moments demonstrate this relationship in Cuban Santería. These moments are: (1) Europe and West Africa at the inception of Spanish colonization and the transatlantic slave trade in the 16th century; (2) Colonial Cuba and Europe during the slave era from the 16th century through the end of the 19th century; (3) Cuban independence from Spain from the mid to the end of the 19th century; (4) Revolutionary Cuba in the 1950s and 1960s; and (5) Cuba today. The shifting hegemonies of the dominant religion, the 'discovery' of the Americas, colonization, slavery, and revolution define how Cuban Santería continues to mold itself to preserve its followers' identities over time.

I discuss the scope of religious syncretism to place this work in the existing

literature. In examining the five historical moments, I first review religion in West Africa prior to the transatlantic slave trade to describe what slaves in the New World sought to preserve. I also discuss early modern Spain's usage of Catholicism to justify the decimation of various peoples which inspired a fear that influenced the early development of Santería in Cuba. Next, I discuss the treatment of religion in Cuba during the colonial period. In the third historic moment, I explore the French and Haitian Revolutions' influences on Cuban society and Cuban independence from Spain. My discussion of the onset of the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s, the fourth historic moment, identifies parallels between Santería and the Cuban Revolution. I also discuss the new, communist politic that, in its attempt to terminate Catholicism, unwittingly supported AfroCuban religion. Finally, I present my observations from the summer of 2014 to analyze contemporary Cuban society, Santería, and AfroCuban identity. In conclusion, I discuss *cubanidad* and its capacity to model the resolution of global issues.[1, 2]

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[1] "Cubanity;" no eloquent translation of cubanidad exists in English. Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban scholar known for coining the term transculturation, defines cubanidad as "not only the result [of the fusion of human lineages] but also the same complex process, disintegrative and integrative, of the substantial elements entered in action, in the context in which it operates and in the vicissitudes of passing" (Ortiz 157).

[2] "[N]o está solamente en el resultado sino también en el mismo proceso complejo de su formación, desintegrativo e integrativo, en los elementos sustanciales entrados en su acción, en el ambiente en que se opera y en las vicisitudes de su transcurso" (Ortiz 157).

Methodology:

I employed a myriad of research methods to conduct my study including archival research, exploratory research/experiential learning, interview, participant observation, and cultural immersion. In the summer of 2014, I conducted my research alongside seven of Dr. Melisa Rivière's other undergraduate students in Puerto Rico and Cuba.

For archival review, I utilized the *Universidad de Puerto Rico—Rio Piedras* library system and the *Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba José Martí*.[3] Though Santería did not originate in Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican university's archive boasts an extensive Caribbean collection that includes works by Cuban scholars unavailable elsewhere in the world. Cuba's national library offered additional insights.

Cuba's national library organizes its holdings using a card catalogue system and a handful of circa 1990 computers. A Westerner might view these search tools as vintage, but they reflect Cuba's economic constraints. I searched the archives using terms I knew to be conventional words associated with race, slavery, religion, and Santería (e.g. Lucumí, AfroCubanism, *cimarrón*, etc.) from my literature reviews at the University of Minnesota and the Universidad de Puerto Rico.[4] Confusingly, such terms did not yield results in the card catalogue. When a computer became available for my use, I ran searches using the same words which yielded plenty of results. The difference in results confirms an underlying assumption of my thesis: Conceptions of race, slavery, and religion have changed in Cuba over time. The card catalogue predates the Cuban

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[3] The University of Puerto Rico—Rio Piedras; Cuba's National Library of José Martí. Cuba considers José Martí a national hero because of his efforts to achieve Cuban independence and his contributions to literature.

[4] Cimarrón is the colonial-era Spanish word for 'runaway salve.'

Revolution, and therefore its contents reflect the social attitudes scholars held prior to the revolution.

One of the main goals of the Cuban Revolution was to end racism (De la Fuente 262). The new government used Cuba's African heritage as a cultural tool to unite the country following the triumph of the revolution (Brandon *Santeria from Africa to the New World* 101). The contrast of the post-revolutionary computer system and the pre-revolutionary card catalogue reflects the revolution's post-racial vision. The shift in the library documentation demonstrates that the Cuban Revolution desensitized certain topics, namely race and cultural phenomena associated with *afrocubanidad*, as the hegemonies that dictate social attitudes shifted. The differences between card catalogue and computer system research results exemplify the dynamics of the last three historical moments' hegemonies.

Exploratory research was a major component of my work in the Caribbean. In Puerto Rico, I visited a few *botanicas* housed in a traditional Latin American market near my affiliate university. A botanica is a traditional healing and religious shop that sells a variety of herbs, small religious icons, and candles bearing the names and faces of various Catholic saints or African *orichás*.[5, 6]

The botanicas I visited were dispersed among various butcher shops, produce stands, and bakery stalls in a dim, covered market, though a few botanicas were situated directly adjacent to each other. Most shops had a counter forming a partial wall

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[5] An orichá is a lesser deity in the Yoruba religious traditions. In contemporary academia, this particular spelling is typically used to discuss Yoruba traditions in the New World.

[6] I visited the market near the Universidad de Puerto Rico—Río Piedras on 16 June 2014 and 3 July 2014 for observation.

along the market's aisle that displayed fresh herbs, inexpensive jewelry, or incense (Figure 1; Figure 2). Inside the botanicas, shelves covered the remaining three walls to house additional products including candles, holy waters (advertising good fortune, increased wealth, etc.), religious statutes (angels, Jesus, Buddha, and orichá figures), packets of cowrie shells, dream catchers, evil eye ornaments, small potted plants, and dried mosses. I considered interviewing botanica shopkeepers, but upon entering their shops they did not seem particularly interested in engaging with any potential customers, much less a student researcher.

In Puerto Rico, I visited San Juan's *Museo de las Americas* which features a permanent exhibit of AfroCaribbean heritage. The collection hosts various African masks, carvings, textiles, and metalwork from a variety of tribes alongside descriptions of traditional governance in Africa, religious beliefs, artistic traditions, and the transatlantic slave trade. Following my viewing, I interviewed two of the docents together. When I later tried to transcribe the interview, I discovered that my recording device had not worked, leaving me without a record of the interview. Rather than yielding an interview workable for my research, I confronted my own limitations.[7]

Upon my arrival in Havana, I immediately noticed many people who practice Santería because of various 'markers,' including all white clothing, short hair, and particular beaded jewelry. I developed a log to record basic demographic information

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[7] At the conclusion of the interview, I recall thinking that the interview had not resulted in any knowledge useful to the development of my research. It was, however, my first interview and served as an opportunity for personal growth. My nervousness played a major role in my inability to redirect the interview back toward the topic of my research. Additionally, the Puerto Rican accent is by far the most difficult dialect of Spanish for me to understand which posed an additional challenge in communicating with them. Both of these frustrations encouraged my development as a scholar.

about the approximate age, gender presentation, race, and markers of wealth (e.g. gold chain, conspicuous alcohol consumption, etc.) of obvious practitioners I noticed on the streets of Havana.[8] I planned to later aggregate the data to glean potential insights into Cuban culture and AfroCubanism.

I immediately scrapped this plan because of the sheer volume of people I noticed. By the time I opened my notebook to record my observations about a single person, another handful of *santeros* would have strolled by me.[9] There were too many people to record. Santería clearly forms an integral part of Cuban culture and people of all races and ages practice it because Santería's nature enables all of its followers to integrate themselves into the dynamic histories of slavery, colonialism, race, justice, and revolution in Cuba.

American law regulating its citizens in Cuba also shaped how I conducted my research. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC), a branch of the U.S. Treasury Department, required undergraduate students to enroll in a credit-bearing course sponsored by their domestic institution in affiliation with a Cuban institution to legally travel in Cuba. The *Centro de Estudios Martianos* sponsored a series of lectures for my research group to fulfill this OFAC requirement.[10]

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[8] I made a local friend shortly after arriving in Cuba, and one day he complained about the ostentation and pomp some "Miami Cubans" use to flaunt their wealth. One way "Miami Cubans" flash their money is by conspicuously consuming alcohol (e.g. leaving multiple cans of beer around or openly carrying multiple bottles of rum) and by wearing lots of gold jewelry—a Cuban national would never have the financial resources to do either of these things.

[9] In the Santería traditions, a santero is a male follower and a santera is a female follower. The word *santeros* refers to a mixed-gender group.

[10] Center for Studies of José Martí; CEM.

Notable Cuban scholars delivered lectures relevant to the research interests of my colleagues and myself to provide a thorough overview of Cuban history and culture to contextualize the observations I made while in Cuba. In effect, the scholars discussed the hegemonies of the five historical moments I previously identified during their lectures.

The interview I conducted and subsequent participant observation offered the most valuable and comprehensive insights. I interviewed two long-time friends of my thesis advisor, Dr. Melisa Rivière. Her friends, Luisito and Ricardo, are *babalawos*, a status akin to that of a high priest.[11] Though they were not central informants to Dr. Rivière's dissertation work, they were familiar with the standards of her scholarship, and by extension, knew what expectations to have of me as her student. Their permission to let me observe and participate in Santería rituals built on Santería's legacy of adapting itself to shifting cultural discourses; in this instance, there was a 'shifting discourse' of Dr. Rivière returning to Cuba with her students, one of whom wanted to research Santería. By interviewing Luisito and Ricardo, I experienced how willingly others are accepted into Santería in today's Cuba, the fifth historical moment. It was a privilege to work with Luisito and Ricardo; without them, this work would be incomplete.

The interviews took place in Luisito's home, where Luisito and other babalawos conduct ceremonies for santeros, their 'godchildren.' Luisito keeps two altars in his living

[11] Babalawo is Yoruba, meaning "Father of Secrets" (Babalawo Luisito, Babalawo Ricardo, and Babalawo Fernán. Interview with author. 7 August 2014, Havana).

room, one for Orula and one for Changó.[12, 13] Both altars have wooden statues to represent the orichás and are draped in beaded necklaces of each orichá's colors. Orula's altar has other religious objects and offerings from practitioners around the statue.

Aside from Luisito and Ricardo, Dr. Rivière and a fellow student, Daisy, were present for the interview on July 30th, 2014. Though I have a good command of Spanish, my thesis advisor served as an interpreter; the interview transformed into a lively conversation between Luisito and Riccardo that was simply too fast for my listening abilities. The babalawos' animation relayed the true meaning of their religion on their terms, a valuable perspective.

Following the interview, Luisito and Riccardo offered to perform consultations with Orula for Daisy and myself, providing my first opportunity to engage in participant observation. A consultation is a divinatory practice performed by babalawos to assist in understanding one's past, present, and future. During my consultation, Orula recommended I partake in a Yoruba baptism under the direction of the babalawos. On August 7th, Daisy accompanied me to Luisito's home for the baptism, which Luisito, Ricardo, and another babalawo, Fernán, performed.

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[12] Orula is a principal deity dating to ancient Africa. Orula's access to Ifá, the knowledge of the past, present, and future, makes him the great diviner in the religious traditions of Santería. Orula's colors are yellow and green.

[13] Changó is a principal deity dating to ancient Africa. He controls lightning, thunder, and war to represent virility. Changó's colors are white and red.

Limitations:

The most significant limitation of this study is that I discuss 'Santería' as if it is a monolithic religion. In reality, Santería is an approximation of ancient West African religions and has various subdivisions including Regla de Ifá, Regla de Ocha, and Palo Monte. Discussing the intricacies and nuances of each tradition is not within the scope of this paper; I seek to argue that Santería continually transforms itself to perpetuate AfroCuban identity as hegemonies of slavery, colonialism, race, and revolution change. In this study Santería refers to any Cuban religious tradition with ancient West African roots.

In the early 18th century white Cubans, while small in number, began to practice Santería and even became babalawos (Perez 212). I do not discuss the inclusion of other races in Santería practice or how these inclusions may have challenged cultural hegemony on small scales. Though Santería began to include non-Afro peoples, I view Santería as an AfroCuban tradition because of its African roots.

Some may argue that my data is limited because I only interviewed and participated in ceremonies with three babalawos. Admittedly, the small number of informants excludes perspectives from babalawos who practice Santería for reasons other than those Luisitio, Ricardo, and Fernán do. Most santeros in Cuba, however, primarily have one babalawo; my Cuban friends were amazed that two babalawos performed a consultation on my behalf. The small number of informants mimics that of most santeros' experiences, and therefore my babalawos realistically incorporated me into the culture of contemporary Santería.

Finally, I am a scholar with a white, upper-middle class upbringing from the United

States. My experiences differ vastly from those of a person of color or those from a different economic strata. Also, while my household was not pious or spiritual in any sense, I do have a vaguely Catholic background. None of these qualities diminish my ability to research Santería, but may have constructed invisible barriers in how my informants chose to interact with me. These 'limitations' describe the ways in which Santería transforms itself when confronted with a shifting hegemony. In this particular instance, the hegemony is one of academia.

Discussion:

"[T]he combination of different forms of belief or practice" defines syncretism ("Syncretism"). In the words of Melville Herskovits, a mid-20th century anthropologist of the African diaspora between the 16th and 19th centuries, syncretism is "the tendency to identify those elements in the new culture with similar elements in the old one, enabling the persons experiencing the contact to move from one to the other, and back again, with psychological ease" (Herskovits 57). Syncretism is an integral component of Santería. Products of the syncretism of Spanish Catholicism and West African belief seen in Santería include coordination between orichás and Catholic saints by identifying shared colors, affiliating common objects, and pairing *patakís* and biblical stories.[14]

Others, namely Luisito and Ricardo, say syncretism was the union of varying African tribes compelled by slavery in Cuba (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). These descriptions of syncretism prompt the conclusion that syncretism is a completed action relegated to history, but these descriptions are too rigid. Each historic moment evidences new transformations of syncretism to preserve African identity in Cuba.

In his critique of Herskovits's notion of syncretism, Andrew Apter, a professor of History at the University of California—Los Angeles, says that it is "not the elements of Old and New World cultures that should be meaningfully juxtaposed in the concept of syncretism…but the orthodox and heterodox discourses in which such elements have been deployed" (Apter 256). Discourses are ongoing throughout history, as evident by

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[14] In Santería, a patakí is a traditional mythological story in the form of an oral narrative, akin to a fable or parable (Otero 86).

Apter, my contemporary, responding to Herskovits's work from the early 20th century. Deeming syncretism a perpetual discourse is an inclusive definition that allows for the temporality which the adaptability of Santería requires. I argue that Cuban Santería must have an adaptable nature to continue perpetuating AfroCuban identity as Cuba's cultural hegemony changes over time.

Historic Moment No. 1: Europe and West Africa at the inception of Spanish colonization and the transatlantic slave trade in the 16th century

Christopher Columbus encountered the West for the first time in 1492, the same year as the Spanish expulsion of the Jews (Kamen "The Mediterranean Expulsion" 30). The Spanish Inquisition of 1478 was still fresh, the Reconquista against the Spanish Moors was winding down, and early modern Spain was further developing its reputation for expunging any 'heathens' and 'pagans' its crown encountered (Kamen "Faith and Doubt" 12; "Reconquista"). This attitude explains the immediate decimation of the indigenous Taíno peoples upon Spanish settlement of the Caribbean (Livi-Bacci 200). Fifteenth century notions of evangelization and saving the 'savage,' indigenous peoples, imported slaves, or any other non-Christian people, characterized the Spanish conquest of the Americas (Rivera and Rivera-Pagán 218). Early modern Spain had a reputation of justifying its systemic depravity, in Spain and the New World, by claiming it was done in God's name (Chasteen 37). This tendency created a fearful environment for non-Spanish peoples, like the slaves who developed Cuban Santería, living in Spain's colonies (Falola and Childs 2004). The fearful environment forced the covert performance of African identity and secret development of Cuban Santería, unlike open religious celebrations possible in West Africa.

The religious conditions in Africa at the inception of the slave trade are critical to understanding the development of Santería in Cuba. The family structure in West Africa transmitted religion, which the evolution of Santería mirrors. In West Africa, people trace their family lineage backwards through their male ancestors (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 59). Children would often "inherit" an *orisha* from a parent and continue the worship of that deity on behalf of their family (Brandon *Santería from Africa*

to the New World 59).[15] The slave trade destroyed the traditional West African family, and therefore made religious practice grounded in blood relationships impossible (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 40—41). In Cuban Santería today, only men may be babalawos and santeros form a fictive extended family with the babalawo as the figurehead (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana; Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 86). The fictive family in Cuban Santería maintains patrilineal custom and familial religious practice that originated in West Africa. Crafting logical parallels incorporated their identities in a way colonial hegemony deemed possible.

The West African religious philosophy of *aché* also explains early Santería's development. Aché is the vital force within everything, whether animate or inanimate (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 39). Aché is akin to the Catholic holy spirit, the difference being that in Catholicism, the holy spirit is present only in true followers of Jesus and aché is equal in everyone and everything. Though the enslavement of West Africans relegated them to a marginal status, their belief in aché asserted their true equality because their aché was no less than anyone or anything else's. Aché's emphasis on equality of existence, and therefore autonomy, identity, custom, and religion, inspired its inclusion in Santería because of its opposition to slavery's insistence on African inferiority. "The persistent practice of African religious beliefs and practices…enabled Africans to resist total dehumanization" (Falola and Childs 160). Aché affirmed their West African identity was equally as valid as any other identity despite the oppressive hegemony of that time.

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[15] In academic circles, the *orisha* spelling of the word typically refers to spirits from West Africa.

Aché's equalizing belief also grounds particular views on syncretism. The aché of various orichás and saints is also considered equal, an idea in alignment with the definition of syncretism that Luisito and Ricardo gave me (De la Torre 2001). As my babalawos told me, the forced migrations of the transatlantic slave trade pushed slaves to preserve their original religious beliefs upon their arrival in Cuba, a belief common among scholars (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana; Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 1998). My babalawos said that most people wrongfully consider Santería's syncretism to be a combination of Catholic Saints and Yoruba deities (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). Luisito and Ricardo used Santa Bárbara and Changó as an example to divide Catholicism and AfroCuban religion, saying that the saint and the orichá are completely separate figures from distinct traditions (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). Syncretism in Santería, for my babalawos, was not about creating a new figure from both Bárbara and Changó. In the words of Miguel de la Torre:

> Distinctions between the santero/a's religion and Catholicism have always been recognized. Practitioners understood the need for placing Spanish masks over the black faces of the orishas so as to defend themselves from religious repression. This is possible because of the ecumenical nature of ashe. Everything that exists contains ashe, thus creating a universality of the Yoruba faith allowing the orishas to manifest themselves in other religions (De la Torre 842).

In other words, orichás may appear in any religion and therefore the syncretism behind Cuban Santería has not produced any new religious figures.

De la Torre, Luisito, and Ricardo are not the only individuals who hold this belief. Cuban anthropologist and santera Calixta Morales argues that "'[t]he saints [in Cuba]

are the same as those in Africa'" (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 162).[16] Morales's comment seems vague considering Africa is an enormous continent, but the ambiguity of Morales's statement alludes to the array of African ethnic groups that the transatlantic slave trade imported to Cuba. The Cuban saints are the same as those in 'Africa' as a whole because individuals from the Congo, Lucumí, Gangá, Carabalí, Macuá, Mandinga, Mina, Arará, Ibo, and additional ethnicities comprised Cuban slave demographics (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 151). After all, Luisito and Ricardo said syncretism was not the incorporation of European ideologies into African belief systems; it was the unification of the African tribes by slaves with diverse backgrounds to preserve West African religious and cultural identities under slavery (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana).

De la Torre's idea of orichás appearing in other religions because of aché can be extended to the conception of the African tribe. Using de la Torre's logic, aché allows for tribes to manifest themselves in other tribes. The 'tribe' in early 16th century Cuba was that of the slave, particularly because slave owners intentionally split up tribesmen when purchasing new slaves (Falola and Childs 2004). The hegemony of slavery reduced the Congo, Lucumí, Gangá, Carabalí, Macuá, Mandinga, Mina, Arará, Ibo, and additional ethnic groups to 'slaves,' a singular category void of ethnic diversity. This social reduction compelled Cuban slaves to modify who constituted their 'tribe' and how 'tribesmen' communicated, a process only possible because of the aché philosophy.[17]

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[16] "'Los santos son los mismos aquí y en África'" (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 162).

[17] Drumming functioned as a language African slaves recognized regardless of their native tongue. Drums remain an integral part of Santería rituals and AfroCuban identity today (Moore 274).

As a tenet of Santería, aché explains why the particular interpretations, like new conceptions of the tribe, occurred as religious traditions moved from West Africa to Cuba.

Historic Moment No. 2: Colonial Cuba and Europe during the slave era from the 16th century through the end of the 19th century

Cuban plantation owners strategically split up families, tribes, greater ethnic groups, and languages of West Africans (Falola and Childs 2004). They intended to mitigate the threat of rebellion by destroying obvious familial, tribal, ethnic, and linguistic bonds. They also halted the original mode of transmitting religion from parent to child (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 40—41). The first major shift in the hegemony disciplining West African religious identity is evident here; the traditional family, and therefore traditional religious practice, was interrupted by the slave trade. The following section discusses how slaves incorporated their traditional beliefs into the evolving institution of slavery in Cuba.

Part of a slave's integration into plantation life included baptizing them and teaching them about the religion of their white masters (Perez 205). Initially, church clerics educated slaves about Christianity, but in 1842, the Good Government Laws "took responsibility for the religious instruction of slaves away from the clerics and gave it to the slave masters, thus assuring that slaves received little religious instruction" (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 63). Slave masters who focused on increasing labor production pressured this policy change and overshadowed the Spanish agenda of evangelization (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 1993).

Spanish colonizers offered limited religious educations to slaves to maximize work hours; the incomplete teachings rendered any Catholic religious efforts ineffective and open to the slaves' interpretation (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 82). In an interview with Natalia Bolívar and Mario López, Lydia Cabrera, a Cuban

anthropologist and poet, said:

> The black slave brought to Cuba by the colonizers to work on the sugar and coffee plantations was baptized in the religion that his owners practiced, without granting priests much time to teach him the fundamental aspects of the Christian doctrine…[T]he black slave made his own interpretations…of Catholicism and adapted the beliefs that they brought from Africa (Bolívar-Aróstegui and López-Cepero 33).[18]

Most slave interpretations of Catholicism stressed the idea that Catholicism was key to freedom. As stated by Natalia Bolívar and Mario López, "Saint Barbara pertains to the religious tradition of white men and the free; conversely, Chango makes his appearance in Cuba as the medium of men reduced to the subhuman condition of slavery" (Bolívar-Aróstegui and López-Cepero 93).[19] Early Cuban santeros recognized that Catholicism, the new hegemony of religion influencing their daily lives, could be used as a veil to protect their religious identities and developed additional interpretations in the *cabildo* system.

The Cuban archdiocese developed a confraternity system, the cabildo system, for Cuba in the 17th century to link the remaining indigenous Taínos and slaves to the Spanish colonizers (Mercadal 543).

> African ethnicity and religion had been cultivated in Cuba in the institution of the *cabildo* from before independence. Cuban cabildos were patterned on Spanish religious confraternities. In Cuba as in Spain, they functioned importantly not only as religious societies but as mutual aid and funeral associations as well. In Cuba,

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[18] "El esclavo negro traído a Cuba por los colonizadores para trabajar en las plantaciones azucareras y cafetaleras fue bautizado en la religión que practicaban sus dueños, sin que estos se empeñas en mucho en brindarles tiempo a los sacerdotes para que les enseñasen los aspectos fundamentales de la doctrina cristiana…[E]l esclavo negro hizo sus propias interpretaciones…del catolicismo y lo adaptó a las creencias que trajo de su ancestral África" (Bolívar-Aróstegui and López-Cepero 33)

[19] "Santa Bárbara pertenece a la tradición religiosa de los hombres blancos y libres; en cambio, Changó hace su aparición en Cuba en el medio de hombres reducidos a la infrahumana condición de esclavos" (Bolívar-Aróstegui and López-Cepero 93).

> the cabildos were originally under the direction of diocesan priests, who carried out a kind of 'guided syncretism,' accommodating African customs as a temporary strategy toward eventual full assimilation of Africans into Spanish Catholicism. The strategy failed and the cabildos became little nations of African ethnic identity and Afro-Cuban religious innovation (Stewart 571).

The Cuban archdiocese sought to offer slaves a false sense of escape under the auspices of the Catholic Church, an institution slaves associated with freedom, while feeling secure in their dominion by using an institutional model familiar to the Spanish (Bolívar-Aróstegui and López-Cepero 199). Racist, colonial assumptions about African inferiority proved to be an advantage to slaves' preservation of their religious and cultural identities. Slaves have always rebelled, and practicing their taboo religion in the cabildos sanctioned by their oppressors was a new way to rebel. "[S]laves often inverted whites' goals of social control by using the same institutions for their own ends" (Falola and Childs 253).

As argued by Orozco, Bolívar, Luisitio, and Ricardo, cabildos laid the foundation for the affirmation of AfroCuban identity, the exact identity Spanish colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade sought to destroy by splitting up families, tribes, and languages in the slave market (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 1998). The Cuban archdiocese had goals of implementing the cabildo system to control the slave community through the power of institutional racism, but eventually time severed the link between the cabildos and the Catholic Church and the archdiocese lost control of the system (Falola and Childs 254). Control transferred to the colonial government which tried to regulate the cabildos, but its oversight was inconsistent, leaving slaves to practice their religions and identities freely within the confines of the cabildo (Falola and Childs 117). As the institutional oversight of the cabildos changed hands, AfroCubans changed how they

would perform their religious identities because each institutional change meant they had to redetermine how to preserve their identities under the new authority.

Cabildos were typically organized by common ancestry and gave West Africans the opportunity to converge socially with others who held the same ancestral beliefs (Falola and Childs 117).[20] However, not all cabildos were restricted to one ancestry; different slave ethnicities often encountered each other in the cabildo system (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). The cabildo system prompted the combination of various religious practices and interpretations of Catholicism into Santería, even though black religious practice was not legalized until 1870 (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 161).

Slaves from Africa and creole slaves born in Cuba comprised 19th century Cuba's black population (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 37). The African-born slaves, already familiar with the cabildo system and illegal religious practice, welcomed the creole slaves to practice Santería as a way to learn about their ancestral homelands and preserve the African identity through sharing such knowledge (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 37).

> Cabildos aided in the transmission of Lucumí culture by furnishing room for rituals, pooling funds to pay for compatriots' funerals, and staging festivals for the spirits on saints' feast days. The leadership of cabildos poached from the Spanish and Cuban aristocratic iconography of the colonial period, acquiring imported porcelains, gilded adornments, and opulent floral fabrics to create sumptuous 'thrones' for patron orichas. Cabildos decorated both elected and hereditary officeholders with royal titles such as queen, prince, and courtier; initiated heads professed descent from legendary monarchs and cult members in Yorubaland on whom the orichas had conferred authority. Cabildos prized 'saltwater' members born in Africa, treasuring the 'secrets' or ritual information they dispensed (Perez

[20] The introduction of ethnically-based organizations likely explains how a variety of sects of Santería developed; each ancestral group had slightly different beliefs that became part of a different sect of Cuban Santería.

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Outside of the legal cabildo system, cimarrones formed *palenques*, barracks they built in the mountains where they were safe from recapture (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 128). The palenques harbored slaves who maintained their specific tribal identity, and later, creole slaves as well (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 151). Like the cabildo, the palenque often served as a place to unite different African heritages by including new interpretations of religious identity that solidified Cuban Santería.

I already mentioned the fictive families common to a particular group of santeros in the first historic moment; this imagined kinship has its roots in groups of slaves belonging to specific cabildos or palenques (Falola and Childs 254). In West Africa, parents passed worship of a particular orisha specific to their ethnic group down to their children (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 78). Cuban slavery prompted an increase in the number of interethnic marriages, which weakened the connection a child could feel to a definitively 'ethnic' orichá (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 78). The interethnic marriages were an adaptation to the multicultural setting plantation owners cultivated by purposely dividing families, tribes, and languages to mitigate the threat of slave rebellion. The rise of the creole slave born in Cuba prompted slaves to transform the rhetoric they used to define themselves to accommodate this adaptation to the hegemony of slavery. Creole slaves were not Lucumí, Macuán, or Ibo from their respective kingdoms like their parents, but AfroCuban with West African ancestry. What remained was a generalized and mixed West African heritage, a heritage many of the cabildos and the palenques reflected.

Palenques and cabildos cultivated the decentralized nature of Santería. Today,

Santería does not have a hierarchy like the Catholic Church. The highest rank possible is that of a babalawo, but there is no limit to how many men can become babalawos, unlike the singular Pope. The Catholic Church parallels Christian cosmology; God is followed by angels, then saints, people, etc., and the Pope is followed by cardinals, then bishops, priests, and lay people (Barrett et al 561). The cosmology of ancient West Africa—Olodumare is followed by orishas, then people, plants/animals, and nonliving things—parallels to that of Christianity (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 13—16; Falola and Childs 119).[21] However, no strong parallels exist between the Old World cosmology or the Catholic Church and the structure of Cuban Santería. To develop a hierarchy in early Santería, the AfroCuban community would have needed to prioritize one palenque, cabildo, or ethnic group but they did not do this. Dividing marginalized slaves to institute a hierarchy would have assured their and their religious identity's demise.[22] Slaves adapted the cosmological hierarchy into the belief of Santería, but not its practice. This adaptation made solidarity inherent in the decentralized nature of Santería, therefore ensuring the preservation of the AfroCuban religious identity despite the opposition imposed by the hegemony of slavery.

Meanwhile in Europe, philosophers of the Enlightenment, including Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, gained prominence in 17th and 18th century France (Curtis 415). They spoke out against clericalism, slavery, despotism, and they demanded humane civil and criminal law of their governments, ideas popular with

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[21] Olodumare is the supreme being who created and sustains the universe (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 13).

[22] This is not to say, however, that cabildos were without conflict. Rivalries existed between a handful of cabildos (Falola and Childs 118). Though internal friction existed, no cabildo superseded the others as superior (Falola and Childs 118).

France's peasant class (Curtis 418). Consequently, their ideas greatly influenced the French Revolution of 1789 (Curtis 419). In 1791, Haitian slaves articulated their rage against slavery and despotism by borrowing from Enlightenment thought and turned their initial uprising into the Haitian Revolution for independence from France and the abolition of slavery (Ferrer "The Haitian Revolution and Cuban Slave Society" 179). The implications of the 1804 success of the Haitian Revolution resonated throughout the rest of the Caribbean, particularly with Cuban slaves and their owners (Ferrer "The Haitian Revolution and Cuban Slave Society" 180). The Haitian Revolution inspired changes to the dominant cultural discourse in the wider Caribbean, and as a consequence, Santería continued to transform itself to preserve African religious identity.

Historic Moment No. 3: Cuban independence from Spain from the mid to the end of the 19th century

Many slaves in the New World saw independence movements as a way to end slavery (Knauer 13). In the 64 year span between Haitian independence and the first Cuban war of independence from Spain, Spanish colonizers took measures to extinguish any hope the Haitian Revolution had inspired in the Cuban slave population. Owners beat slaves and hung signs that read "'This is the fruit of the imagined liberty of French slaves'" around their necks to further humiliate them (Ferrer "The Haitian Revolution and Cuban Slave Society" 181 and 182). The first Cuban war of independence began in 1868 and amplified slave owners' fears that slaves would create their own anti-colonial and anti-slave struggle (Ferrer "Slaves, Insurgents, and Citizens" 15; Knauer 13). This heightened fear caused the gradual dissolution of the cabildo system by the mid-1880s to stop slaves from fraternizing and developing their own revolutionary ideas (Knauer 13). The end of the cabildo era was another hegemonic shift that necessitated new interpretations of AfroCuban religious heritage for its preservation.

The Spanish legalized black religious practices in 1870 and abolished slavery in 1886, likely a move to overstep a slave rebellion that would have left many Spanish colonizers dead (Orozco and Bolívar-Aróstegui 161; Suchlicki 54). Blacks could then legally practice their religion, but the elimination of the cabildo drove many of them to practice their religion in the personal homes they could now legally own. Practicing Santería and African identity preservation thus became a more private affair. The transformation of the home into the physical center of religious worship, a feature still observed today, was yet another adaptation of Santería to a changing hegemony. This

era's hegemony dictated that Santería could no longer develop in the cabildo system.[23] The transition into the home, a representation of the decentralized structure of Santería and a marker of its preservation, made AfroCuban identities harder to police by outsiders (Falola and Childs 266). This lack of control spurred a violent prejudice against the AfroCuban community's outward identity performances. This new prejudice was met with demands, like public recognition of a race-based political party, from the AfroCuban community as a means to affirm and protect themselves and their identities after the Spanish-American War.

Cuban independence was a direct result of the Spanish-American War. Cuba had two previous unsuccessful liberation wars, the Ten Years War (1868-1878) and the Little War against Spain (1879-1880) ("Cuban War of Independence"). The last war, the Cuban War of Independence, began in 1895 ("Cuban War of Independence"). An American ship, the *Maine,* was sunk in the Havana Harbor in 1898, and the United States and Spain declared war on each other ("Cuban War of Independence"). The United States issued resolutions for Cuba's independence, and President McKinley renounced any claims that the United States wanted to annex Cuba ("Spanish-American War"). However, in the early 1890s, the United States already controlled much of the Cuban economy, to be discussed later ("Cuban War of Independence"). The

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[23] It should be noted, however, that "[w]ith the end of legal slavery in Cuba in 1886 and Cuban independence in 1902, cabildos de nación were reconfigured for post-abolition society and the new Cuban nation. Reformulated as communities called 'reglas,' after the regulations of cabildo life, and 'socorros mutuos,' mutual aid associations, ***the former cabildos deemphasized ethnicity and religious affiliation***…Cuban authorities and some Afro-Cubans considered cabildos to be vestiges of an old era and obstacles to establishing a modern society. Furthermore, officials considered cabildos de nación and secret African-derived societies a threat to social and political stability" (Falola and Childs 121; my emphasis).

Spanish-American war ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1898, and Cuba gained full independence when the United States ended its military occupation of Cuba in 1902 ("Cuban War of Independence").

The desire for the formation of a black political party developed within the first decade of the new republic's existence. AfroCubans had comprised the majority of the troops in the independence wars (Helg 143). They argued their wartime participation entitled them to sociopolitical recognition by the new republic, particularly with regard to equal employment opportunity (Helg 143). The idea for such a party gained ground, and in July of 1907, AfroCuban veterans issued a document titled "Manifesto to the People of Cuba and to the Raza de Color" (Helg 143). In 1908, AfroCubans held a political demonstration to advocate for the formation of a political party based on race (Knauer 13). The Cuban government swiftly shut the demonstration down; anti-blackness pervaded Cuban politics, a threat to general AfroCuban identity performance at large (Knauer 13).[24]

Regardless, the *Partido Independiente de Color* was founded later that year to advocate for the full integration of AfroCubans into society and government (Helg 146 and 147).[25] In 1912, the party unsuccessfully lobbied to be included in an upcoming election (Helg 194). The party resolved to organize an armed protest to provoke a response from the Cuban government (Helg 194). Unfortunately this lead to the Massacre of 1912 in which the Cuban army killed hundreds of AfroCubans and put an

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[24] A critical distinction between the government of 1908 and the 1960s is that the government of the 1960s sought to create a post-racial Cuban society (De la Fuente 262). The 1908 shutdown had a purely racist motivation.

[25] Independent Party of Color.

end to the Partido Independiente de Color (Helg 194).[26]

This AfroCuban push for sociopolitical recognition inspired a wave of witchcraft scares (Knauer 13). In early 20th century Cuba, the dominant, white(r) classes automatically deemed crime to be black sorcery (Knauer 13). Regardless of innocence or guilt, blacks were mercilessly killed, religious objects were seized and burned, and religious ceremonies were interrupted (Knauer 13). Obviously, however, Santería was not extinguished by efforts to demonize the AfroCuban population.

Laws forbade the use of ritual drums, a potent representation of African heritage (Brandon *Santeria from Africa to the New World* 85). Santeros changed the construction of their drums by adding metal keys, wooden strips, and altering the drums' shape to make them seem more "white" and bypass these laws (Brandon *Santeria from Africa to the New World* 85). African religious organizations "took on the characteristics of secret societies coated with a thin veneer of Catholicism sufficient to conform to the codes of the secular authorities and sufficient to shield the African rites they still practiced" (Brandon *Santeria from Africa to the New World* 85). The aché philosophy allows AfroCuban drums and religious institutions to transform while maintaining their power and validity. Given the adaptable nature of Santería, instances like these explain why Santería is widely practiced despite the historic egregious methods of control used against Cuba's black community.

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[26] The Massacre of 1912 inspired the famous documentary *Breaking the Silence* by Gloria Rolando Casamayor, an AfroCuban filmmaker from Havana, Cuba.

Historic Moment No. 4: Revolutionary Cuba in the 1950s and 1960s

The Cuban Revolution did not begin as a socialist one; Fidel Castro did not declare Cuba a socialist and atheist state until 1961 (Duncan 221; Brotherton *Revolutionary Medicine* 36). Nevertheless,

> Castro's revolution symbolically tied itself to Santeria. The revolutionary guerrillas were based in Oriente, the colonial haven for runaway slaves and a stronghold for African religions. Many of the guerrillas, upon entering La Habana, wore *elekes* and waved the red-and-black flag of the 26 July Movement.[27] These colors are significant because they belong to Ellegua…considered first among the trio of holy warriors (Oggún and Ochosi being the other two).[28] As these colors triumphantly arrived in La Habana, spectators familiar with Santería saw Ellegua (the appropriate symbol for what was to be a self-espoused guerrilla society) enter the city, ready to provide protection to Cuba and her people. Crucial was the date of the rebel's entry into La Habana—1 January, Niño de Atocha's day, the holiest day of the *orishas* when the course of history is set for the rest of the year (De la Torre 846).

Orula, the great diviner, more fully explains parallels between Santería and the Cuban Revolution. Orula influences fate by bringing individuals into favorable or unfavorable situations after reviewing Ifá, the objective knowledge of the past, present, and future (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). In a santero's mind, Orula's workings produced the coincidences that aligned the Cuban Revolution with Santería.

> The most often cited evidence of Castro's 'designation' by the *orishas* occurred on 8 January 1959 during his first national speech from Camp Columbia. While he pleaded for unity and peace, a white dove landed on his shoulder. In addition to being a Catholic symbol for the Holy Spirit, the white dove is also the Santeria

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[27] An eleke is the necklace a Santería initiate receives to connect them to their orichá on a daily basis.

[28] "Elegguá opens spiritual pathways…[and]…revolutionaries seem to have suggested with this symbol [i.e. the red and black flags] that the Moncada attack opened new political and social paths, and that African deities were directly involved in the process" (Moore 266).

> symbol of Obatali, the son of Olodumare.[29] One *patakí* states that during a physical battle between the brothers Changó and Oggtún, Obatali appeared on the scene. Suddenly a white dove hovered over the combatants, bringing an end (however temporary) to the brother's feuding. Castro symbolically occupied this ambiguous religious space. For Christians, he assumed the role of the Son of God, the Prince of Peace (Mat. 3:16-17). For santera/os, he appeared as Obatali, the divine provider of peace. Even Cuba's oldest daily newspaper, the conservative *Diario de la Marina*, referred to the incident as an 'act of Providence' (De la Torre 846).

Surreal incidents like that of Castro and the dove, whether real, theatrical, or invented, affirmed the idea that the orichás sanctioned the Cuban Revolution. The new hegemony developed and enforced by the Cuban Revolution sanctioned Santería and AfroCuban religious identities.

> For many Cubans, the battle between Batista and Castro was as much a spiritual war as a physical one, and Castro won because of the *ebbos* done on his behalf.[30, 31] *Ebbos* done by the vulnerable disenfranchised became a 'safe' alternative to challenging the dictatorship of Batista, allowing them to participate safely in the triumph of Castro (De la Torre 846).

They found ways in which the Cuban Revolution aligned with their identities, thus santeros managed to transform their religious identities to revolutionary ones as well to conform to the new hegemony proposed by the revolution, though Fidel Castro ultimately declared Cuba an atheist state. Santeros shaped the revolution's success by completing ebbos, thereby adapting their faith to current events.

> AfroCubans felt they stood to gain the most from the socialist Cuban Revolution

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[29] Olodumare is the supreme creator deity in ancient West African and Santería religious traditions.

[30] Fulgencio Batista was Cuba's president between 1933—1944 and a dictator between 1952—1959 who is remembered for exploiting the Cuban economy for personal gain ("Fulgencio Batistsa").

[31] An ebbo is an animal sacrifice, offering of fruit, or ritual bath to honor and nourish a particular orichá.

because of their historic marginal status (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 83). The new government viewed AfroCuban religion as a manifestation of Cuban culture while it viewed Catholicism as imperialistic because of its colonial Spanish origin, and Santería clearly benefitted from this ideological framework (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 80). Santería built on its historic marginalization and continued to preserve AfroCuban identity as culture rather than religion in accordance with the hegemony brought on by the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

> The Cuban Revolution of the 1960s was marked by these precepts:
>
> > The essential feature of Castro's revolution was its anti-Americanism… 'Yankee Imperialism'…[Castro] pledged political guarantees, civil rights, 'establishment of a civil service,' free elections in all trade unions, distribution of barren lands with 'prior indemnification to the former owners,' an intensive campaign against illiteracy, acceleration of industrialization, and the creation of new jobs. His revolution would be 'a humanist revolution' (Williams 481).

Imperialism is characterized by the policies or practices by which one country increases its power by controlling other parts of the world ("Imperialism"). American corporations controlled so much of the Cuban economy that the United States was the likely cause of any economic crises in Cuba, including the crisis that incited the Cuban Revolution (Hugh 451). The Cuban Revolution challenged the economic imperialism of the United States by uniting the Cuban working class against Cuba's President Batista and the capitalists exploiting them (Hugh 449). The imperialism of the transatlantic slave trade controlled West Africa by forcibly removing its peoples from their homelands. Santería challenged the racial imperialism of slavery by uniting various West African ethnicities and adapting itself as history compelled it. The imperialism of slavery and the economic imperialism of the United States aligned Santería and the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban Revolution therefore affirms AfroCuban religious practice because both were

humanist responses to the imperialism of their times.

Nancy Moréjon, a Cuban poet from Havana, stated that "[t]he history of the African continent has been plagued by thousands of tribal conflicts. Only in America could Africa become a symbol of unity, due to the diaspora its descendants interwove in search of their liberation" (Morejón 938). Liberation in Moréjon's example is the agency and freedom to perpetuate the African identity in Cuba. The Cuban Revolution was another search for liberation. The non-religious motivations of the Cuban Revolution and the development of Santería link both movements to self-determinism, whether on national or individual spiritual levels, despite the challenges posed by American industry and racism. In the 1960s, AfroCuban identity could directly align itself with this most recent hegemonic shift. In summary, both Santería and the Cuban Revolution fought against imperialism and for liberation; they share similar goals, to which many santeros would credit Orula.

Castro banned all types of religious schooling and institutions when he declared Cuba an atheist state in 1961. However, previous adaptations of Santería to slavery and racial violence ensured the preservation of AfroCuban religious identity despite Castro's declaration (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 83). Abolition rendered palenques useless and cabildos were outlawed in the 1880s; Santería had already adjusted itself to be practiced privately (Falola and Childs 2004). The development of Santería itself was a rebellion; Santería embodies resistance. Santería challenged the atheist Cuban Revolution, demonstrating the malleable nature of Santería in conjunction with a changing hegemony. Further, the new regime initially allowed Santería to flourish as the religion of the popular class while Castro focused on disassembling the Catholic Church

and its institutional authority that threatened the new regime (Falola and Childs 11).[32] Revolutionary moments require solidarity; interrogating Cubans to determine who could be trusted as an honest atheist and who could not be trusted would divide Cuba, not unite it. Politically, Castro only needed to remove conspicuous traces of religion from the public arena to strengthen the validity of the new regime. Unlike the previous historic moments, Santería did not have to transform to preserve itself. As long as it remained decentralized as it had already developed in the second historic moment, the new cultural discourse defined by the Cuban Revolution and Castro would continue to affirm AfroCuban religious identity.

Cuba's new government redefined how Cubans worked, lived, and envisioned their national identity and cubanidad. The Cuban government could not easily constrain Santería because of its private practice, nor did it need to because Santería lacked institutional authority. To further the revolution's goal of creating a post-racial society, the government viewed Santería as a manifestation of culture, as opposed to a religious one (Brandon *Santería from Africa to the New World* 101). The Cuban Revolution venerated Cuba's African roots as a method of rejecting residual Spanish colonialism and imperialism inherent in Cuban culture. In a speech Fidel Castro gave in 1959, he said "We have to uproot the last colonial vestiges…a Cuban is more than white, more than black, and we are Cuban" (Kronenberg 198). "Given the Cuban Revolution's emphasis on the nation's African roots, African-based religious rites (considered 'fetishistic' magic in the early stages of the Revolution) were gradually embraced as examples of Cuban popular and folk culture and included in artistic venues, overlooking

[32] Still today, Cuban school children are taught that Santería is the popular religion of Cuba.

their religious context" (Fernández-Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 79—80). The new government's goals allowed santeros a sociopolitical space in which to affirm their identities. This space did not exist under the hegemonies of the previous historical moments.

An early example of the Cuban government using religion as a cultural tool to unite Cuba was the opening of the *Museo de Guanabacoa* in 1964 ("Museo Municipal de Guanabacoa").[33] A family who practiced Santería offered to convert their colonial-era home into the museum to venerate their *cultural* (i.e. religious) heritage. The museum displays artifacts from the Santería, Palo Monte, and Abakúa religious traditions.[34]

The Cuban government also encouraged established artists to incorporate religious folklore into their work to represent the new Cuba (Falola and Childs 267). Musical and dance performances hosted by the *Teatro Nacional* incorporated AfroCuban religious music into many of the events (Falola and Childs 267).[35] The central aim of these performances was to disseminate information about Afrocuban culture to scholars, hoping that tolerance of AfroCubans would follow knowledge production (Falola and Childs 268). Campaigns to package Santería as a Cuban cultural object, like packaging the various religious traditions into a museum, demonstrate the government's efforts to conform AfroCuban identity to the new socialist hegemony, an action which promoted AfroCuban religious identity preservation.

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[33] The Museo de Guanabacoa (Guanabacoa Museum) is named after the Guanabacoa municipality of Havana.

[34] Visit to Museo de Guanabacoa on 7 August 2014.

[35] National Theatre; founded in 1959.

Historic Moment No. 5: Cuba today

Today's Santería uses economic advantage as a tool to preserve AfroCuban identity because of the Special Period in a Time of Peace. The Special Period in a Time of Peace began in 1990, marking the beginning of Cuba's recent economic crisis (Holbraad 647). The fall of the Soviet Union withdrew the financial backing the Cuban economy desperately needed, and the implementation of the Helms-Burton Act by the American Congress in 1996—the blockade—only exacerbated Cuba's financial crisis (Brotherton "Macroeconomic Change" 350). The crisis prompted many individuals and the Cuban government to create new revenue streams, often by commodifying culture for tourism.

While Santería is a valid religious epistemology, the beginning of the Special Period in a Time of Peace compelled the Cuban government to package Santería as Cuban heritage for touristic consumption (Knauer 4). "In the wake of the loss of Soviet economic supports, the Cuban government shifted its economic policies to promote tourism as a source of hard currency to prevent economic collapse and support social spending…Consequently, the 'heritage industry' has exploded" (Knauer 4).

> Some enterprising santeros and santeras and other AfroCuban religious specialists have been able to register their homes as State-recognized cultural centers. Many performers, artisans, and religious practitioners have thus been able to parlay their expertise (real or ascribed) in black culture into a means of supporting themselves and their families (Knauer 5).

Some may believe that appropriating Santería for monetary gain is unethical or immoral, particularly because, as Luisito and Ricardo told me, a babalawo's job is "to save humanity" (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). Religious or ethnic identity as commodity is not particularly unique, but

the Cuban example splits the religious practitioners into two different groups.[36] Santería developed from the unification of various African tribes in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries but now it exists seemingly as two tribes: practitioners that are commercially focused and those who are not. My thesis advisor, who has researched in Cuba for 15 years and is a santera herself, said that it is glaringly obvious when a babalawo is strictly commercial and has no real connection to the deities he claims to invoke.

My babalawos, Luisitio, Ricardo, and Fernán, do not earn their living from their religious services. They solely ask their godchildren to pay what they can for rituals performed on their behalf.[37] They do not need to sell their religious practices. The overhead for my baptism cost $40, and they told me so, knowing that even as a 'broke' college student, an American tourist could afford the overhead and happily pay it. My babalawos later told me that they typically ask foreigners to pay between $150 and $200 dollars for their services. Presumably, the babalawos stockpile the profits from the services performed for foreigners to finance ceremonies for Cuban nationals who cannot cover the cost for their own ceremonies. Their price hike does not reduce their validity or raise any moral questions, but it does show that 'real' babalawos may foray into a more touristic territory. Charging relatively wealthy foreigners more sustains the AfroCuban religious identity because it ensures others, namely Cuban nationals, may partake in Santería ritual in the future despite the limitations a weak economy imposes.

While in Havana, I visited Calle Obispo with two of my friends and noticed a

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[36] Christian examples of religious identity as commodity include: selling Christian rock albums, buying and mailing out Christmas cards, or producing a movie telling a biblical story like 2014's *Noah*.

[37] Orula knows how much an individual can afford to pay because of his access to Ifá, a Santería belief that codifies honest payment.

religious shop named *Tienda Religiosa Omi Oñi* selling a variety of white clothing, elekes/*idés*, and small dolls.[38, 39, 40, 41] My companions stopped to ask the shopkeeper questions and feign interest in purchasing something while I surreptitiously recorded my observations. My friend examined a pure white shawl and the shopkeeper's sales pitch made no mention of how it could also be used as a headscarf in the year following one's initiation—she just talked about how it was a very fashionable piece.[42]

In an artisanal market near the hotel I stayed at, a particular vendor sold idés for various orichás. When I approached her table and inquired about them, the vendor told me the price, and then she turned to discuss the *Manos de Orula* in more religious detail with another customer.[43] Both vendors presumed I had a limited knowledge of Santería, rightfully so. When a prospective buyer's presumed background excludes AfroCuban religion, vendors talk about religious objects differently. In other words, they adapt their explanations to conform their religious beliefs with the expectations they hold of their prospective buyers to preserve their businesses and Santería. While selling

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[38] Calle Obispo is a beautiful boulevard in Old Havana; it hosts many boutiques for foreigners, street performers, and colonial buildings.

[39] I hesitate to call this shop a botanica because it did not appear to have various herbs, holy baths, or candles for sale.

[40] An idé is much like an eleke, but it is a bracelet a practitioner must wear every single day. Each santero has an idé to represent Orula and another to represent their specific orichá.

[41] Visit to Tienda Religiosa Omi Oñi on 24 July 2014.

[42] In the year following an initiation into Santería, santeros must dress in all white. During their initiations, santeros must shave their heads; as I observed, women commonly wrap their bare heads in the first few months following their initiation.

[43] A Mano de Orula is an idé specific to Orula. The colors of a Mano de Orula are always green and yellow, where green represents hope and yellow represents life (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana).

religious artifacts can desensitize the vendors to Santería, it is how Santería conforms to the hegemony of economic pressure.

Vendors do not foray into more touristic interpretations of Santería in the same ways my babalawos do, but still manage to preserve AfroCuban religious identities in their versions of religious commodification. Vendors need to sell enough products to ensure their shops remain open, regardless of their customer demographics or how they market their products. As long as their businesses remain open, the AfroCuban identity remains present in the market and the public sphere and demonstrates that Cuban society accepts AfroCuban identities. Selling cubanidad in the form of religious objects associated with Santería affirms AfroCuban identity.

Callejón de Hamel is a small alleyway famed for its murals (Figure 3) honoring AfroCuban heritage; a few Cubans I met recommended I visit because of my interest in Santería. When I visited, a tour group had just piled out of their bus and a guide explained, in English, the street's significance and representations of AfroCuban heritage. Various art installations paraded as shrines to different orichás, but none of them resembled the altars in Luisito's house. The murals incorporated stereotypical African motifs, bright colors, and Spanish-language quotations or poetry. There was a sign advertising a restaurant that claimed "Nuestra Comida=Aché" (Figure 4).[44, 45]

Santeros and babalawos know that everything has an equal amount of aché, so while claiming one's food has aché is true, it is not a major selling point for members of the Santería community and, frankly, pointless. Foreigners seeking to consume the

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[44] "Our Food=Aché."

[45] Visit to Callejón de Hamel on 26 July 2014.

'exotic' Santería, however, would be more impressed with this claim as a cute and harmless way to honor AfroCuban heritage. The hegemony of a weak economy necessitates the creative commodification of religion and culture, so declaring that a particular restaurant's food is aché is an understandable marketing tactic. Telling foreigners who carry relatively more purchasing power than a Cuban national where to go and what to do to consume cubanidad and afrocubanidad aligns perfectly with the Cuban government's desire to prevent further economic collapse (Knauer 4).

A painting (Figure 5) I found in the Calle Obispo market exemplifies another commodification of religion.[46] The painting I found was a take on Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* image. The electric-colored Cuban version had four cans, "Havana's Condensed Sex Soup" with Betty Boop; "Havana's Condensed Victory Soup" with Che Guevara; "Havana's Condensed Religion Soup" with Elegguá; and "Havana's Condensed Classic Soup" with a baseball player arranged in a grid on the canvas. The juxtaposition of politics (Che), popular culture (Sex and Baseball), and religion (Elegguá) initially amused me, a clear outsider to Cuban culture. At the same time, this quasi-religious image likely offends some because it relates AfroCuban religion to an artist critical of how culture, and by extension, religion, is often manufactured (Schroeder 476).

Reiterations of iconoclasm have occurred in various forms all throughout history, continually policing how images express religious affiliation. The destruction of religious icons because a religious authority fears the veneration of an inanimate object, as opposed to pure spiritual and immaterial (Christian) worship, characterizes iconoclasm

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[46] Visit to Calle Obispo market on 2 August 2014.

(Payton 633). The iconoclast movement in the Byzantine Empire (8th and 9th centuries) is an earlier, more extreme example of how religious imagery offends (Payton 633). In the 8th century, bishops spoke out against religious icons and their objections eventually gained political support and nearly all Byzantine icons created before that time were lost (Payton 633). In the early 20th century, a modern version of iconoclasm was seen when the Cuban government and public confiscated religious objects associated with Santería because of the fear inherent in a hegemony that devalued the AfroCuban identity (Knauer 13). In 1999, the Brooklyn Museum of Art (BMA) exhibited Chris Ofili's paintings at its *Sensation* show (Barstow).[47] Ofili's painting, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, depicted a black Madonna surrounded by female genitalia, collaged together with real cow dung (Barstow). Ofili and the BMA sought to shock the public and force them to consider 'tolerance' with the painting and *Sensation* as a whole. The mayor of New York City eventually brought a court case against BMA to remove Ofili's work from display because the public found the piece incredibly offensive (Barstow). The court ruled in favor of the museum citing the right to free speech (Barstow).

The Cuban Campbell soup can image of Elegguá (Figure 5) I saw in Cuba, however, occupies a different historical context than Byzantine art from the 8th and 9th centuries, religious artifacts in 20th century Cuba, or Ofili's work. Unlike the church supporting iconoclasm, the police in 20th century Cuba, or the mayor of New York City, there is no central religious authority for Santería with the absolute power needed to police images like the one I saw.

The Cuban government has relied on remittances and tourism as primary sources

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[47] Chris Ofili is a contemporary black painter from England of Nigerian heritage.

of foreign income, particularly with the beginning of the Special Period. Therefore, the government has little interest in restricting touristic revenue streams to appease the public, and no religious authority exists to suppress religious imagery either. The controversial image therefore asserts autonomy. The Campbell Soup Can spin-off demonstrates the preservative and adaptable nature of Santería because Santería has evolved to conform to the economic opportunities available in Cuba though this image. The tourist's purchase of such a painting preserves Santería, in some form, in their memory. The Andy Warhol spin-off also speaks to the enduring nature of Santería and the AfroCuban identity. The painting's place in the market shows that Santería pervades Cuban pop culture, just as Warhol is known for his emphasis on pop culture.

After my baptism, Daisy, my peer, and I were walking with the babalawos to dispose of the baptismal waste. I felt like a spectacle with leaves and animal parts stuck in my hair, but no Cuban walking down the street gave our group a second glance. Daisy noticed this and she laughed, saying "They [the Cubans] know what's up." Santería permeates everyday Cuban life to the point where its ritual is not a spectacle because it has always managed to adjust itself in accordance with the current hegemony to preserve the AfroCuban identity.

My babalawos introduced me to my final example of how Santería reacts to hegemonic changes, specifically in contemporary Cuba. They told me about the controversy surrounding the "Letter of the Year" (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana). On December 31st, babalawos perform divinatory rites asking Orula to forecast the upcoming year's political, economic, and social climate (O'Farril 56). There is only one Orula and therefore one would expect

that any Letter of the Year rite would have the exact same outcome. In reality, there are 26 different official letters produced worldwide by both religious and commercially based organizations every single year, though most Cuban governmental organizations recognize the Letter of the Year from the *Asociación Yoruba de Cuba Consejo de Sacerdotes* ("Historia de la Ceremonia de la Letra del Año").[48, 49] Most Cuban babalawos consider the letters from the Asociación Yoruba de Cuba Consejo de Sacerdotes or the *Comisión Miguel Febres Padrón* in addition to the letters they produce specifically for their families and godchildren (Babalawo Luisito and Babalawo Ricardo. Interview with author. 30 July 2014, Havana).[50] The existence of separate Santería-based organizations begs many questions: Are varying groups—religious and commercial—preserving AfroCuban identity? If so, is it the same AfroCuban identity? Is this an adaptation of Santería to Cuba's contemporary hegemony?

Groups practice their religious traditions differently, though they all still preserve AfroCuban identity. While some may argue that the different subdivisions of Santería like Regla de Ocha or Regla de Ifá mean that multiple AfroCuban identities exist, discussing the nuances of each are not within the scope of this paper. Each subdivision of Cuban Santería is rooted in ancient West Africa, and therefore they all affirm a unified

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[48] These cultural-religious institutions are not to be confused with the old cabildo system. These institutions were founded in response to the campaigns promoting Santería as Cuban heritage. The formation of institutions such as these has not changed the decentralized nature of the religious tradition; babalawos from the various types of Santería (Regla de Ocha, Regla de Ifá, etc) use these organizations to prompt discussion amongst themselves, but still perform the majority of their religious rites in their homes.

[49] Cuba's Yoruba Association Counsel of Priests; the Cuban government funds this organization (Routon 123).

[50] Miguel Febres Padrón Commission.

AfroCuban identity. Religious oriented organizations and individuals preserve AfroCuban religious identity through ritual and honest belief in their religion. Touristic institutions and individuals preserve AfroCuban identity through polishing it like a work of theatre and profiting from such efforts. Both types transmit knowledge of how to perform the traditions in ways that the cultural and economic hegemonies of Cuba deem acceptable.

Conclusion:

Cuban Santería's adaptability to shifting hegemonies is evident over five distinct time periods: (1) Europe and West Africa at the inception of Spanish colonization and the transatlantic slave trade in the 16th century; (2) Colonial Cuba and Europe during the slave era from the 16th century through the end of the 19th century; (3) Cuban independence from Spain from the mid to the end of the 19th century; (4) Revolutionary Cuba in the 1950s and 1960s; and (5) Cuba today.

Syncretism must not be considered the historic merging of Catholic and Yoruba religious traditions. Santeros have always reacted accordingly to any shift in hegemony to preserve Santería and AfroCuban identity. Considering the adaptable nature of Santería, syncretism should be considered an ongoing dialogue that accounts for the temporal nature of religious practice over time.

The first historic moment discusses the West African religious traditions that slaves brought with them to the New World. These traditions include family structure, patriliny, and the aché philosophy. The first period also discusses Spain's history of using Christianity to validate injustices that inspired a fearful environment that ensured the secret nature of Cuban Santería. The combination of these elements unified African tribes under slavery to develop Santería and affirm African identities within the context of the hegemony of slavery.

The second historical moment discusses how Santería began to develop under the hegemony of slavery. Plantation owners intentionally split up tribespeople to mitigate the threat of rebellion and clerics were responsible for teaching slaves about Catholicism. This instilled the notion that Catholicism was the religion of the free. Slaves and

cimarrones began combining these aspects of colonial Cuban culture with their West African beliefs in cabildos and palenques, which gave rise to the fictive families featured in Santería today and the religion's decentralized nature. These combinations are some of the earliest adaptations of Santería to the cultural hegemony to affirm African identity. I also explain how Enlightenment thought in Europe inspired the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian Revolution's aftershocks were felt throughout the rest of the Caribbean and inspired new hegemonies of autonomy and race.

Cuba's independence from Spain qualifies the third historic moment. Evidence of the influence of Haitian independence was evident in the maltreatment of Cuban slaves. Eventually the cabildo system era ended for fear that slaves would develop their own revolutionary ideas and assert abolition and independence of their own accord. After the Cuban wars for independence and Spanish-American war, AfroCubans founded a political party based on race to demand recognition for their contributions to Cuban society and identity. Violent conflicts surrounding the founding of the Partido Independiente de Color sparked witch hunts in which the cultural hegemony demonized the AfroCuban identity.

The Cuban Revolution of the 20th century dominates the fourth historical moment. I reference symbolic ties between Santería and the Cuban Revolution to explain how Santería molded itself to align with the hegemony the revolution proposed. Examples included Elegguá and the colors of the July 26th Movement, Fidel Castro's speech and the white dove, and the ebbos santeros completed to support the revolution. After the triumph of the revolution, Castro banned religion but Santería already had a long history of covert practice. The ban on religion posed no threat to the loss of the AfroCuban

identity. The Cuban government viewed Santería as a cultural object rather than a religious one to further the new regime's goal of developing a post-racial society and therefore affirmed AfroCuban identity.

The fifth historic moment, contemporary Cuba, is characterized by a weak economy. Santeros have been creative in developing adaptations of their religious practices under the hegemony of a weak economy. Some babalawos practice strictly for tourists to earn a living, vendors sell religious artifacts differently depending on the customer, and even my babalawos will charge tourists more for their services to subsidize services for Cuban nationals. All are just trying to survive and preserve their identities. Advertisements on Callejón de Hamel and an Andy Warhol-like painting further demonstrate how Cubans have commodified their religion for an economic advantage and to preserve their identities in any way because of Cuba's economic situation. The controversy behind the Letter of the Year shows that while different groups present the AfroCuban identity in different ways, they are all trying to preserve the same heritage through Cuban Santería under the hegemony's current circumstances.

Throughout history, Santería's adaptable nature has proved its endurance. Regardless of the most recent hegemonic shift, santeros have found a way to conform their beliefs and identities to the dominant cultural discourse.

Conclusión:

La adaptabilidad de la santería cubana a las hegemonías en cambio es evidente por cinco épocas distintas: (1) Europa y África occidental al inicio de la colonización español y la trata de los esclavos transatlántica en el siglo 16; (2) Cuba colonial y

Europa durante la época de la esclavitud del siglo 16 hasta el fin del siglo 19; (3) La independencia cubana de España entre el medio de siglo 19 hasta el fin del siglo; (4) Cuba revolucionaria en los años 50 hasta los años 60; y (5) Cuba hoy en día.

No deben considerar el sincretismo para ser el mezclo histórico del catolicismo y de las tradiciones religiosas africanas. Los santeros siempre han reaccionado en consecuencia a cualquier cambio hegemónico para preservar la santería y la identidad afrocubana. En consideración de la adaptabilidad de la santería, deben considerar el sincretismo para ser un diálogo que permite la naturaleza temporal de la practica religiosa con el tiempo.

El primer momento histórico analiza las tradiciones de Africa occidental que los esclavos trajeron al Nuevo Mundo. Estas tradiciones incluyen la estructura familiar, la línea paterna, y la filosofía del aché. El primer periodo también habla de la historia español de usando el cristianismo para validar sus injusticias en contra de sus gentes colonizadas. Esto inspiró un ambiente de miedo que garantizó la naturaleza secreta de la santería cubana. La combinación de estos elementos unificaron los tribus africanos debajo la hegemonía de la esclavitud para desarrollar la santería temprana y para afirmar las identidades africanas.

El segundo momento histórico habla como la santería comenzó de desarrollar debajo la hegemonía de la esclavitud. Los dueños de las plantaciones dividieron los miembros de tribus africanos comunes intencionalmente para mitigar la amenaza de una rebelión y los clérigos religiosos tenían la responsabilidad de enseñar los esclavos sobre el catolicismo. Esto inculcó la noción que el catolicismo fue la religión de los libres. Los esclavos y los cimarrones comenzaron combinar estos aspectos de la

cultura colonial cubana con sus creencias africanas en los cabildos y las palenques, cual causó el desarrollo de las familias ficticias de la santería de hoy en día y la naturaleza descentralizada de la religión. Estas combinaciones son algunas de las adaptaciones la más temprana de la santería a la hegemonía para afirmar la identidad africana en Cuba. También explico como la Ilustración de Europa inspiró la revolución haitiana por la independencia. La revolución en Haití inspiró las nuevas hegemonías de la autonomía y la raza en el resto del Caribe.

La independencia de Cuba de España califica el tercer momento histórico. La evidencia de la influencia de la independencia de Haití fue evidente en el maltrato de los esclavos cubanos. Eventualmente la época del sistema del cabildo terminó por temor que los esclavos desarrollaran sus propias ideas revolucionarias y afirmaran la abolición y la independencia de su propia voluntad. Después de las guerras cubanas por la independencia y la Guerra Hispano-Estadounidense, los afrocubanos fundaron un partido político basado en la raza para demandar el reconocimiento de sus contribuciones a la sociedad cubana y las identidades cubanas. Los conflictos violentos que pasaron después de la fundación del Partido Independiente de Color inspiraron una caza de brujas en la cual la hegemonía cultural demonizó la identidad afrocubana.

La revolución cubana del siglo 20 es el cuarto momento histórico. Refiero a las relaciones simbólicas entre la santería y la revolución cubana para explicar como la santería se moldeó para alinearse con la hegemonía que la revolución propuso. Ejemplos incluyen Elegguá y los colores del Movimiento 26 de Julio, el discurso de Fidel Castro con la paloma blanca, y los ebbos que los santeros completaron para apoyar la revolución. Después del triunfo de la revolución, Castro prohibió la religión,

pero la santería ya tenía una larga historia de la práctica encubierta. La prohibición de la religión no representaba una amenaza a la identidad afrocubana. El gobierno cubano considera la santería para ser un objeto cultural más que lo religioso para promover el objetivo del nuevo régimen en desarrollo de una sociedad puesto racial y, por tanto, afirmó la identidad afrocubana.

El quinto momento histórico, Cuba contemporánea, se caracteriza por una economía débil. Los santeros han estado creativos en el desarrollo de las adaptaciones de sus prácticas religiosas bajo la hegemonía de una economía débil. Algunos babalawos practican estrictamente para los turistas de ganarse la vida, los vendedores hablan de los artefactos religiosos que venden de forma diferente según el cliente, e incluso mis babalawos cobrarán las turistas más para subvencionar servicios para los ciudadanos cubanos. Todos están tratando de sobrevivir y preservar su identidad. Un anuncio en el Callejón de Hamel y una pintura inspirada por Andy Warhol demuestran además como los cubanos han mercantilizado su religión para una ventaja económica y para preservar sus identidades en el contexto de la económica de Cuba. La controversia de la Letra del Año muestra que aunque los grupos diferentes presentan la identidad afrocubana en maneras diferentes, todos están tratando a preservar su identidad por la santería cubana debajo la hegemonía contemporánea.

A lo largo de los siglos, la naturaleza adaptable de la santería ha demostrado la resistencia de la religión. Independiente de los cambios hegemónicos, los santeros siempre han encontrado una nueva manera para conformar sus creencias y sus identidades al discurso dominante cultural.

Figures:

Figure 1: Botanica in Puerto Rico

Figure 2: Botanica in Puerto Rico

Figure 3: Callejón de Hamel

Figure 4: Restaurant sign; “Nuestra Comida=Aché” (“*Our Food=Aché*”)

Figure 5: “Havana’s Condensed Soups” from the Calle Obispo market

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Appendix: Understanding Cubanidad

Secrecy forms an integral part of Santería (Brandon "The Uses of Plants" 56). During my baptism, my babalawos told me to close my eyes because the ceremony was so secret I could not watch it.[51] They told me I could record my thoughts and feelings about the experience, as long as I did not reveal the process of the ritual to anyone. Some, like Natalia Bolívar, must determine how much they can reveal in their academic lives without ostracizing themselves from their fellow babalawos or santeros. Generally, many scholars and students of AfroCuban religion must extrapolate upon their experiences or sources to understand Santería because of this secrecy. In fact, some scholars writing about Santería have never even been to Cuba.

Most Americans who 'think' about Cuba—form opinions about Cuba, produce scholarship, or enact policy—have never traveled there. These individuals expound upon Cuba too, and misinterpretations of these extrapolations are dangerous (Kidder 207). Few people who make policy decisions about contemporary Cuba in the United States have seen Cuba with their own eyes. Fortunately, this will soon change because President Barack Obama recently reinstated diplomatic relations with Cuba and eased travel restrictions ("FACT SHEET"). A tangle of history, economics, conflict, and justice mediated by American politics, not self-identifying Cubans, historically defined Cuba in the American mind. But according to Nancy Morejón:

> Cuba is not an island that listens to the enchanting voice of Nausicaa.[52] Cuba is not the tail of an African tiger. Cuba enjoys a character and a culture of symbiosis, of radical confrontation with anyone who tries to

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[51] Baptism occurred on 7 August 2014.

[52] Nausicaa is a siren-like figure in Homer's *Odyssey*; *Nausicaa* means "burner of ships" in classical Greek.

> destroy it, drawing on the solid values of a moral world forged through long struggles for independence (Morejón 394).

Morejón mentions the struggles for independence, which obviously include Cuba's three wars of independence from Spain, but does not explicitly exclude the revolution's goal of freeing Cuba from American economic control. American politics have failed to balance more conservative perspectives with ones of solidarity to inform its policy in the Caribbean. A statement from the White House admits that U.S. isolation policies have failed ("FACT SHEET"). Cuba must be as Morejón describes. In the words of Dr. Melisa Rivière, "Why don't we just take them to Cuba so they can see for themselves?" Such a balance will allow people who have experienced Cuba to resolve outdated policy, and hopefully the expected influx of travelers to Cuba will help realize these goals. Hopefully more Americans will think like Dr. Melisa Rivière.

This balance can be likened to the balance between Santería and the shifting hegemonies it has endured. Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban sociologist from the early 20th century, said "'the true history of Cuba is the history of its highly intricate transculturations [i.e. syncretisms]'" (Morejón 934). We must accept and understand Cuba's deep afrocubanidad to understand cubanidad and how it continues to transform. Unraveling the history of AfroCuban religious identities and their relationships with varying hegemonies models how the United States and Cuba can unravel their own societies and politics to resolve historic grievances and advance global justice. *Todos somos americanos.*

Apéndice: Conocimiento de la Cubanidad

La clandestinidad forma una parte integral de la santería (Brandon "The Uses of Plants" 56). Durante mi bautismo, mis babalawos me pidieron cerrar mis ojos porque la

ceremonia fue tan secreta no podía mirarla. Me dijeron que pude recordar mis pensamientos y mis emociones en mi diario sobre la experiencia si no la revelo el proceso del ritual a cualquier persona. Algunos, como Natalia Bolivar, necesita determinar lo que pueden revelar en sus vidas académicas sin condenarse al ostracismo de sus propias comunidades de los babalawos y los santeros. Generalmente, muchos eruditos y estudiantes de la religión afrocubana tienen que extrapolar por sus experiencias o los fuentes para entender la santería por esta clandestinidad. De hecho, algunos eruditos escribiendo sobre la santería nunca han ido a Cuba.

La mayoría de estadounidenses que 'piensan' sobre la Cuba—forman opiniones sobre Cuba, producen la escolaridad, o promulgan la política—nunca han ido. Estos individuos exponen por Cuba también, y malinterpretaciones de estas extrapolaciones son peligrosas (Kidder 207). Pocas personas que hacen decisiones sobre Cuba contemporánea en los EEUU han visto Cuba con sus propios ojos. Afortunadamente, esto va a cambiar pronto porque Presidente Obama de los EEUU reincorporó recientemente las relaciones diplomáticas con Cuba y relajó las restricciones de viajar ("FACT SHEET").[53] Un enredo de la historia, la economía, el conflicto, y la justicia mediado por la política estadounidense definía históricamente a Cuba en la mente estadounidense. Pero de acuerdo a Nancy Morejón:

> Cuba no es una isla que escucha a la voz encantada de Nausicaa.[54] Cuba no es la cola de un tigre africano. Cuba disfruta un carácter y una cultura de simbiosis, de la confrontación radical con cualquier persona que intenta a destruirla,

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[53] El bautizo me passó el 7 de agosto 2014.

[54] Nausicaa es una sirena en La Odisea de Homero; *Nausicaa* significa "ella que quema los barcos" en griego clásico.

> usando los valores sólidos de un mundo moral forjado por las luchas de independencia (Morejón 394).

Morejón menciona las luchas de independencia cual obviamente incluye las tres guerras de independencia de España, pero no explícitamente excluye la meta de la revolución de liberar Cuba del control económico estadounidense. La política estadounidense ha fallido para balancear perspectivas conservativas con las de solidaridad para informar su política en el Caribe. Una declaración de la Casa Blanca admite que la política de aislamiento ha fallido ("FACT SHEET"). Cuba tiene que ser como Morejón describe. En las palabras de Dr. Melisa Rivière, "¿Por qué no los trajimos a Cuba así puedan ver por sus mismos?" Un equilibrio permitirá personas que han sentido a Cuba para resolver la política anticuada, y con suerte, el influjo de viajeros anticipado a Cuba alcanzará esta meta. Con suerte, más estadounidenses van a pensar como Dr. Melisa Rivière.

Este equilibro es similar al equilibrio entre la santería y las hegemonías que la religión ha sobrevivido. Fernando Ortiz, un sociólogo cubano del siglo 20, dijo que "'la historia verdadera de Cuba es la historia de sus transculturaciones intricadas [i.e. sincretismos]'" (Morejón 934). Tenemos que aceptar y entender la africanidad profunda de Cuba para entender la cubanidad y como la cubanidad continua transformar. Explorando la historia de las identidades religiosas afrocubanas y sus relaciones con las hegemonías diferentes demuesta como los Estados Unidos y Cuba puedan resolver sus propias sociedades y sus políticas para mejorar las circunstancias de agravios históricos y avanzar la justicia global. *Todos somos americanos.*